



Anne  
with an e.

Front cover: Anne Merklng at UCLA, circa 1944

Write to Be

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Dedicated to a once-in-a-lifetime woman,  
Anne B. Merklng

1926 - 2022

# Anne

with an e.



a collection of stories



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*We were laughing, Dick always tells a little different story than I do. We'd say to Dad, what version are we going to hear today? His memory and my memory don't exactly coincide. We laugh about it, it's one of the family jokes.*

## Working Mothers and Chasing Turkeys

Brigham City, Utah 1926

*December 21, 1926 Anne Bowen, 9 lbs., 14 oz. born to Louis Clinton and Maude Forsgren Bowen. "Forsgren" comes from "the forest of the green river" in Finland.*

In our backyard we had a big, big apricot tree. I learned how to pull a chair outside so I could climb up the trunk and get on the lower branches and from then on I called it my tree. I lived there, practically. My tree became a sailing ship like Tarzan and the Apes. It was my dollhouse, it was everything. I was very fond of it, and I continued all the rest of my life to be a very good tree climber.

My parents were so delighted to have a baby because they were both over 30. My mother said that my father carried me around on a pillow, he didn't trust his arms, so he carried the fragile little 9 lb. 13 oz. baby around, on a pillow. I don't think I was very petite at almost ten pounds so you never know how people will grow up, do you?

The house we lived in was once the Pioneer Library for Brigham City. It was a time when the Carnegie Libraries were springing up all over the country. Andrew Carnegie was a philanthropist who had money introducing libraries all over the state and fortunately the new Carnegie Library was a block away from the old one. We lived in the old one because my mother worked for the bank.

When we were growing up and there was all this discussion about women working instead of staying home with their children, my brother said, "Anne, do you realize what a deprived childhood we had? Our mother worked!" She did, but I felt she was always with us, so it was interesting how times have changed. In an emergency, I could run up to her office, get some help. I didn't think of her as a working mother, I thought of her as a full-time mother.

When my mother was 14 years old, she was living with my aunt to go to secretary school. She knew typing and shorthand and all of those things. When she worked in the bank, a patron would walk in the doors and the banker didn't have as good of a memory as she did. She would whisper the name of who walked in so he could greet all of his customers. It was an interesting little assignment she had.

He told her that the library had been remodeled and it was available for a very reasonable price, and he thought my mother and her sister should invest in a place

to live. So Mother and Dad were married and Mother got her sister interested in the house. That was a really fun house to live in. The proximity made me live half my life at the library and half at home where my father planted roses and gladiolus and loved being in his own home.

My grandmother was so remarkable. My mother worked in the courthouse across the street after I was born. When I was big enough, I would go across the street and run up to the county agent's office to find her. She would save me or else I would always go find my grandmother. I always went to her when I had a fall or scrape because she used iodine which didn't sting so I always went to her when I was in trouble.

She usually had fresh bread coming out of her oven. Her oven was a coal-burning stove and when she would pull out the bread, it was always perfect. I wondered how in the world she could control the heat in that kind of oven and come out with such beautiful, beautiful food.

I had an aunt that lived on every block in town. I had four of her sister's homes where I was always welcome, like it was my own. All I wanted to eat and all the loving I could receive, all over town. Made it a wonderful place to be. I liked my Aunt Grace the most, especially because she didn't have children. When she got married, I cried and cried. She eloped which really upset the family. I was heartbroken, my favorite aunt was gone.

The playground was a block away and they had a wading pool and, now that I think about it, it was the most unsanitary place in the world. I could get in the wading pool when I was five. Mother taught us that we could take our clothes off and go in the sprinkler to wash the grass off, but I would take them off in the wading pool. So I would be swinging my bathing suit on my finger walking down the busy street and the neighbors would say, "Well, Maude, we saw your daughter coming home from the pool again!"

My father's father, my grandpa, single grandpa, lived there alone in this apartment. My father's mother died when he was eight years old. He would have lunch everyday with his daughter and dinner everyday with us, so we saw him all the time. When you see a picture of him you see why he made such a great Santa Claus.

He was especially happy to have family and people around. He liked to go fishing, every vacation we ever had, we went fishing. That continued until we moved to California. I used to go out into the gardens and dig worms for their fishing trips. I would get these finger size long worms, they called them nightcrawlers, and I would stuff them in my pants pockets and my mother would say, "Anne, you have to stop putting the worms in your pockets, each and every time I turn on the washer, the worms float to the top." I had uncles with farms nearby and if they had an orphaned lamb or orphaned goat, they would bring them into our house and



Brent and I would feed them until they were old enough to go back into the flock. We had some wonderful times with our baby lambs and baby goats. We finally had to take the goat we loved very much out to the farm because he would get up and walk on our roof. It's a two-story house! Not really very safe for him, he was a real climber.

My mother had to hang her clothes and tie up the goats or else they would eat the clothes. Afterwards, when we would go visit him on the farm, we would call his name and he would come to us. It was a fun life. We always had pigs, lambs, goats, and dogs and we loved them very much. My mother's refrigerator was a dumb waiter. Every once in a while, we would pull up a mouse with it.

I had an aunt and uncle who lived on a farm in Idaho, and I loved to go see them. It was none of the modern conveniences. We had an outhouse that I was sure a snake lived in. They had a windmill that pumped the water up, right from the well in the ground, and I always thought that was pretty wonderful. They also had a turkey farm and there was one turkey in that group that had been trained by one of their older sons to be a fighting turkey and I was always warned to keep away from the turkey. I had quite a few adventures with him.

One time, I was out in the hen house gathering up the eggs and starting back to the farmhouse and here came the turkey and there went my collection of eggs. They had a teeter totter, and it was a really long one so you could go way high. My cousin and I were playing on it and I was on the up side, way in the air, and she was down and she said, "Here comes the turkey!" She jumped off her end and I went crashing to the ground, but I was so scared I didn't see if I had broken bones I just took off for the house as fast as I could run so I could escape the injury of being caught by the turkey. We thought that the turkey liked bright colors and, of course, I was dressed like a little girl that could run away quick.

Another time, we took food out to the thrashers that were cutting the wheat and the turkeys liked to go in there, of course, easy food. So I started back to the farmhouse and here came the turkey and I ran towards the barbed wire fence and dropped myself under and rolled and ran again. My uncle was watching me and said, "Well, I was going to save you, but I have never seen anybody duck and roll as fast as you could." I got my army training there, I guess.

There was also an old man who lived in the hills and once a month or so he would come to the farmhouse to buy food to take back to his cave and I was sure now that I am grown up that he wasn't dangerous. If me or my cousin saw him, we'd say, "Here comes the wild man!" Boy, we raced into the house and up into the attic and hid until he went away. He was really bearded and fit the role entirely. It was a great place to spend my summers. It was fun, scary, but a place I loved to go.



My little cousin, about my age, and I used to go out to the windmill for some nice mud and we baked mud pies and mud cakes. We'd take some of the dry sand and sprinkle it on our cakes, so they were pretty.

One day a preacher came to see my parents with my aunt and uncle, and he brought his little girl out. My aunt pointed out where the girl could find me. Well, here was Miss Priss and her clean little prissy dress with ribbons and bows and her pretty shoes. She was not interested at all in making mud cakes with us. She hurried back to her safe place.

The farmer in town used to bring out a flat board truck. All the kids in town wanted to go pick beans and so he drove us out to our field. Definitely child labor. We would get very hot there doing our bean picking, but there was a little ditch that ran through it right on the edge with running water.

My girlfriends and I decided we would go to the ditch and get ourselves wet, I can't remember, I think we just took our shirts off, being the tender age and no boobs or anything one of the bigger boys yelled out, "Hey, the girls are down in the ditch - undressed!" Not entirely but we were out of that ditch quick and grabbed our shirts. I did some kind of wild things when I was young. Fun being a small-town girl.

One day, my parents had been painting the porch and my brother and I had a great idea. They left green paint sitting there, and we decided we would paint the neighbor's cat green. We had no idea that would be frowned upon. Everybody had to get milk and wash the neighbor's cat to get the green paint off.

We always heard that animals, you know, can put a curse on you. So later when John was a little boy, about two years old, walking and getting around, they were building a house next door to us, and the neighbors were painting and left the house. I went looking for John and this thing walked up to me, a little boy painted green. He had green hands, down to his pants. A sticky mess. I didn't at first recognize it, but it was really my little boy and so we called the hospital and they said to put him in a milk bath and very gently wash to get the paint off. Don't use paint remover on him, they told us. I thought to myself, this is the curse from the green cat.

My father was especially happy to have me and my brother. He was always making something for us. A great big swing or a sandbox we could fill with sand or water. He would decorate his tricycles for me and my cousin with crape paper in the spokes and little shades that went over our heads. He would have to walk behind us and give us a little push so we could participate in the Peach Day Parade.

It was hard for me to believe this, but it was my great grandparents, my great grandmother's father who colonized and came over in covered wagons and built

the town and grew the crops. Brigham said to some, like he did to my grandparents, "I would like you to go to Arizona and build a church." They had to leave their homes and get in covered wagons pulled by horses, no oxen, through the Colorado River and into Arizona and start a city in what is now Saint Johns, Arizona. That's still a very vibrant Mormon community. My parents eventually went back to Brigham City, but we visited there. The houses they built there are still there. It is a drive-in town, but now has its own temple.

When Dick joined the church, we only had eight temples, now there are 150 or so. Interesting stories and interesting heritages, it's important for our family to study it.

### *One Bicycle*

The Great Depression 1930's

When we were ten years old, 1937, our country was in the midst of the Great Depression which I didn't pay much attention to. I was happy about my life.

Our great emancipation was when Brent and I got a two-wheeled bicycle for Christmas and, being in the heart of the Depression, we got one bicycle. We were to have his day and my day. It was all marked on the calendar: Brent's Day, Anne's Day. That's when we could ride the bicycle. The joy of riding the bicycle with the wind blowing in my hair, it was absolutely the most wonderful thing I could imagine. It was an elegant bike, it had fenders and a horn with one of the first blue tires ever made. It cost \$40 which was an immense amount of money in those days so that's why we shared that bicycle. We got it for Christmas and that day it snowed, the first snow of the season. We couldn't take our bicycle out on the street until the snow went away and it was two or three months before the snow was melted and the ground was hard before we could ride it so we had it sitting up in our bedroom on a stand and both of us rode that bicycle every day waiting for the weather to get better. It was a big deal in our life.

My father had lost his business which was an auto repair shop because farmers and everyone in town needed their car repaired but couldn't pay him. He would repair cars, trucks, and tractors for farmers, but no one had cash. They would give him a sack of potatoes, a side of beef, or some pork chops. He had no cash to pay the shop, so we eventually had to leave Brigham City. Everyone, at that time, was going to California because there were more jobs open for men. I was very, very sad about leaving my grandmother.

Los Angeles, California 1936. Age 10.

Today was a lovely day. This is how Anne started every diary entry while she was growing up. Her stories are a true reflection of the joy and wonder she felt for her life.

A tree climber and avid adventurer, she lived through the Great Depression, a time when women could only aspire to be secretaries, and violent racial undertones of World War II were spreading throughout the nation.

Anne served as the General's wife to high-school sweetheart, Richard E. Merkling "Dick", a three star general of the United States Air Force, who she was in love with for 76 years.

A true pioneer, she started a preschool on Nellis Air Force base and was one of the first trained workers in Mesa, Arizona to open a Church of Latter Day Saints temple.

Anne was an exquisite seamstress, artist, teacher, and dedicated mother to four often raising them with military aids while Dick trained and fought in World War II, the Korean War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Vietnam War.

Living among the cherry blossoms in Japan to the cobblestone streets of Belgium with other high-ranking wives, she embodied the example of a true American, friend and neighbor. Through endless and often abrupt moves across the world, she never questioned her dedication to Dick, the Church, and serving their country.

These are a collection of her stories, as she told them.